

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

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Easter at Gannawarra

I arrived at Gannawarra, a few kilometers south of Koondrook, about lunchtime on Friday, but already those who had been there the day before were enjoying an afternoon out at the Barham wetlands after a morning cruise on the Wetlander. I found a spot to put my tent up not very far from Gunbower creek. Maggie's tent and ute weren't far away. I'd only just set up the tent with some help from a neighbour when son-in-law Bryan, and Lucie and Tristan arrived. Had I seen the Crested Pigeon, and the Wrens at the gate? I had - and so the trend of the conversation for the next three days. While I rested Tris and Bryan went back down to the gate and saw, and heard, a lone Grey-crowned Babbler. Maggie, Lucie and I went back down with them later and saw it too. There was much speculation as to why it was on its own, because these are gregarious birds. It certainly had lots of sympathy, if only it realized!

Down by the gate we also saw a family of Pied Butcherbirds. It was the melodious call that drew our attention to them.

The Bird Call that night, when the birds seen for the day are added to the official bird list around a campfire, was most impressive, with a White-bellied Sea-eagle being seen from the Wetlander, and Bush Stone-curlews at the Barham cemetery, and the real highlight of the camp, a white phase of the Grey Goshawk on the Island not far from the camp. I myself had made a list of 25 birds just around the camp area for the afternoon. Some of my favourites were the Purple Swamp Hens, the female Darter, the Pied Butcherbird family, the Swamp Harrier, the Reed Warblers and the Grey-crowned Babbler.

Next day was our chance to go out on the Wetlander. We certainly weren't late for our 9 o'clock start, because the shooters woke us about 6.30. While we got breakfast a family of wrens were hunting for theirs not far from the tent.

Not far from the Wetlander mooring was the "pet" male Darter. He

is so used to people passing that he watches them warily, but doesn't take off from his perch. We could see large white birds landing in the trees some distance away, but the thickness of the forest and the movement of the boat made it impossible to see whether they were Ibis, Spoonbills, Cockatoos or Corellas! As it was very windy the captain decided it would be better to keep going upstream rather than try to sail down stream to where the sea-eagle had been seen, but it was still worth while. An Azure Kingfisher flying along the side of the boat brought gasps of delight from those who saw it, but Whistling Kites, Eastern Rosellas, Yellow Rosellas, Brown Tree-creepers, Wood Ducks, a Hobby and Swamp Hens were among the many species that all had their admirers. One chap pointed out the tail end of a python disappearing into a hollow, no doubt for nefarious purposes.

We left the boat at about 11.30 and drove to the riverside park in Barham where we had lunch under the Red Gums beside the river. There were mostly Noisy Miners to be seen there, 'though Wood Ducks, Masked Lapwings and a Common Bronzewing were also seen. When Lucie and I called at the same spot on the way back she found a pair of Fairy Martins perched in the rafters of the toilet block.

From there we were taken to an orchard where we were able to pick two oranges each, and I am sure they were the juiciest oranges I have ever eaten. From there it was on to the wetlands. There was only one thing wrong with the place and that was the bulldog ants - ask Maggie about them! but it was still worth it to see hundreds of birds, including Pink-eared Duck, Grey and Chestnut Teal, Royal and Yellow-billed Spoonbills, Peaceful Doves, Black Swans, another Hobby, Greater Egrets, Cormorants, Ibis, Black-tailed Native Hens and best of all, Red-kneed Dotterels and a Peregrine Falcon - which didn't seem to be doing too well with its hunting despite the number of birds there. Back near where the cars were parked was another bonus - a family of Grey-crowned Babblers. Some people had also seen Diamond Firetails.

After this visual feast Peter Disher took us back to the cemetery where we were able to watch the Bush Stone-curlews for quite a while. He didn't even learn about our success until evening as he'd gone home before we found them.

All sorts of outings were planned for Sunday, but soon after the campfire that evening the drizzle started, and later, rain, and by morning some had decamped due to wet tents and bedding, but those who stayed on had a wonderful morning birdwatching in the rain. The track was too soft for us to go out (we were camped in a farm paddock), so we birdwatched, at Peter's advice, around the camp area on foot, to stop the track out from being too churned up. This turned out to be a delight.

Even while the light rain was still falling Superb Fairy-wrens could be seen bobbing all over the grass, Welcome Swallows and Tree Martins were swooping and dropping to the ground to pick up insects and flying off again. Jacky Winters were also showing up in numbers and were hunting insects in their way. Someone nearby saw a pair of Diamond Firetails hunting too, until a resident Willie Wagtail chased them off his territory, but it seemed a perfect morning for the insect eaters, if numbers were anything to go by.

The night before wood moths, including Wattle Goat-moths, were coming to the light at the campfire, so it should have been a good night for Frogmouths if any were around. They weren't heard, but I don't think they call at this time of year.

Simon had arrived the previous afternoon, and he, Tris and I braved the rain and headed out on to the road, and were rewarded with the sight of Dusky Woodswallows bathing in the water off the leaves, dozens more wrens, several more Jacky Winters, and a Western Gerigone, Yellow Thornbill and Buff-rumped Thornbills all in the same small area. There were lots more, and the two boys went out in the afternoon and added White-breasted Wood-swallows to their already impressive list for the day.

While we were walking along the road in the morning a young lad from a nearby farm stopped on his four wheel "tractor" and got chatting. He told us how they occasionally see Wedgetails, and one day one was down on the road under the trees we were under at the time, and as they drove behind it in their vehicle it had to keep down and follow the road as there was nowhere at that spot for it to fly off to the side. He commented that with its huge wingspan it seemed to reach from one side of the road to the other. Quite an experience.

I had to leave next morning, but the family stayed on, and I got the report on Wednesday night that they had seen the Stone-curlews again, but best of all the Chestnut-crowned Babblers were found at Eight Mile, (8 miles north of Barham) and the White-winged Wrens out another few kilometres in the saltbush.

The final official count amounted to the grand total of 128 species, three more having been added on the last day out at the wetlands by the few who had stayed on, but the highlight of the camp would have to be the White Goshawk. The day after it was first seen a number of people went out to the island and it was seen again and the sighting definitely confirmed.

I thoroughly enjoyed the camp, as I have no doubt all other ninety-

odd campers did, too.

On the way home I called in at Mount Hope, on the Major Mitchell Trail. It's an attractive area; great granite boulders rising out of the flat plain, and lots of shrubs, mainly wattles, growing between. From the short track from the picnic area up to a private road I looked back and could see all the way back to the Murray. I heard lots of bird calls, including, I am sure, the Painted Honeyeater, but a pair of Black Kites were hunting, as were a pair of Little Eagles, and a Magpie was sitting on the top of the biggest boulder telling the world that this is his territory.

Rita Mills

Sandon Bird List for April

Pacific Black Duck	Fuscous,
Brown Falcon	Brown-headed and
Masked Lapwing	White-naped Honeyeaters
Galah	Scarlet Robin
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Eastern Yellow Robin
Crimson Rosella	White-browed Babbler
Australian Owlet-nightjar (h)	Varied Sitella
Kookaburra	Golden Whistler
White-throated Tree-creeper	Rufous Whistler (19/4)
Wren	Grey Shrike-thrush
Spotted Pardalote	Grey Fantail
Striated Pardalote	Willie Wagtail
Speckled Warbler	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Weebill	Australian Magpie
Brown,	Grey Currawong
Buff-rumped,	Australian Raven
Yellow-rumped and	White-winged Chough
Striated Thornbills	Diamond Firetail
Red Wattlebird	Welcome Swallow
Yellow-faced,	Silvereye
Yellow-tufted,	

Susanna Starr

Swift Parrot Survey, 27/4/96 **Pound Lane, Newstead**

Susanna Starr, Bob Webb, Simon Kennedy and Rita Mills spent an hour in Pound Lane. The trees are mostly Yellow Gum, Yellow Box and Grey Box open forest and the sparse understory consists of almost exclusively Hedge Wattle and Weeping Cassinia. Although no Red Iron Bark is found there the birds have been seen there in the past - but not this time.

Rita Mills

Pound Lane Bird List

Long-billed Corella (25 seen)	Brown Falcon (2)
Red-rumped Parrot (12)	Eastern Rosella (2)
Galah (12)	Blue Wren (1)
Red Wattlebird (7)	Grey Shrike-thrush (1)
White-browed Babbler (7)	Australian Magpie (1)
White-plumed, (5)	Welcome Swallow (1)
White-naped, (3)	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike (1)
Fuscous (2) and	Australian Raven (h)
Yellow-faced Honeyeater (1)	Striated Pardalote (h)
Brown Tree-creeper (4)	Spotted Pardalote (h)
Diamond Firetail (3)	Silvereye (h)
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (3)	Swift Parrot (0!)
	Simon Kennedy

Pampas Grass an Environmental Weed

Originally introduced from Argentina as a garden plant, Pampas Grass is now common in Victoria in both garden and bushland alike.

Widespread plantings for windbreaks, soil stabilization, forage and ornamental purposes have increased dramatically over the last 20 years.

Previously propagated vegetatively - and some old plants show no signs of setting seed - the recent unwitting importation of highly fertile seed as well as a pink-flowered variety has set the scene for a disastrous explosion in numbers and one female flower spike has the potential to produce 100,000 fertile seeds.

Pampas grass looks set to be proclaimed a noxious and environmental weed in Victoria following the lead of Tasmania, South Africa, California and New Zealand, where it has become a serious and expensive weed of bushland and agro-forestry.

In Tasmania a very successful publicity campaign encouraging the voluntary removal of plants in urban and rural areas has resulted in a high level of control except in wilderness areas, and this includes World Heritage areas.

Help protect our local bushland by avoiding this plant; there are many native rushes and sedges as alternatives that can be used.

Susanna Starr.

WELCOME to new club member, Fred Cotterill.

PUBLICATION UPDATE

Castlemaine Plant List. Current issue of the Castlemaine Plant List is edition 9.20. It lists 631 native species and 333 introduced species, with 10,241 locality records. The cost has increased to \$3.00, but the print quality has improved.

Rare and Uncommon Plants of the Mt Alexander Shire. This is a new publication. Cost is \$5 printed, or \$1 on an IBM computer disk. It lists rare and uncommon plants, with distribution information, and localities.

Castlemaine Bird List. The new issue is Edition 8.0. Cost is still \$1.

The Club's bird list is now based on a 5 minute grid system. Each grid is about 7 km by 9 km. A sketch map of the grids can be obtained from E Perkins. Accurate position of the grids can be obtained from a survey map.

Either the distribution of birds in our area is rather patchy, or there is lots of scope for some bird watching. Castlemaine grid has 172 species recorded. For some other blocks we do not have a single record. The current count in the bird list is as below.

Grid No	Name of grid	Grid No	Name of grid
A 70	Bell's Swamp	V 103	Campbell's Creek
B 31	Baringhup	W 107	Porcupine Ridge Track
C 59	Moolort	X 4	Glenlyon
D 41	Plaistowe	Y 1	Sedgwick
E 38	Campbelltown	Z 106	Barker's Ck Reservoir
F 1	Smeaton	a 100	Faraday
G 0	Shelbourne	b 88	Fryer's Range North
H 86	Nuggetty	c 15	Fryer's Range South
I 99	Gough's Range	d 0	Denver
J 79	Newstead	e 26	Emu Creek south
K 96	Sandon	f 51	Sutton Grange
L 0	Kooroocheang	g 77	Jennings Hill
M 1	Lockwood South	h 44	Taradale
N 96	Porcupine Flat	i 69	Malmsbury
O 117	Gower	j 34	Upper Coliban
P 121	Strangways	k 0	Mosquito Creek
Q 1	Franklinford	l 127	Lyll Glen
R 19	Shepherd's Flat	m 56	Mt Lofty
S 2	Ravenswood	n 36	Metcalf East
T 57	Ravenswood South	o 8	Black Hill
U 172	Castlemaine	p 1	Kyneton South

Why not take your binoculars on an outing, and add to some of our meagre records?

E.P.

EXCURSION TO TERRICK TERRICK

The Club's excursion to Terrick Terrick on May 11th was in beautiful autumn weather. Birds were abundant. Some of the highlights of the trip were

-the finding of a clump of Cane Wire Grass (*Aristida ramosa*) in flower, on the northern side of Mt Terrick. Cane Wire Grass is one of the less common grasses, and the only local record was made by Ian Higgins at Sutton Grange. Like all *aristidas*, it has a three-awned lemma.

-the aboriginal water hole, on the west side of Mt Terrick, with a population of Pond Lily (*Ottelia ovalifolia*), and Starwort (**Callitriche hamulata*). The starwort

is remarkable because of the variation in its leaves. The lower submerged leaves are narrow, and several centimetres long. The upper leaves are oval, with three distinct veins, and only a few millimeters long. The Swamp Lily was in flower, but rather than having showy flowers on the surface, the flowers were submerged, and hidden inside leaves. This kind of flower is self-pollinating, and never rises to the surface.

-the masses of Mistletoe present on Deane's Wattle. Despite a fairly careful search by several of those on the excursion, only two kinds of mistletoe were found. The Grey Mistletoe is parasitic on wattles, and has distinctive up-turned flowers, resembling candles in a candlestick. The Box Mistletoe is parasitic on eucalypts, and at Terrick grows on Yellow Box.

-the masses of Rock Correa flowers. Rock Correa usually has green bells, but many pale red bells were present at Terrick. There were perhaps responsible for attracting the Singing Honeyeaters.

-the abundance of birds. Most of the Terrick Terrick regulars were seen: Hooded Robins, Red-capped Robins, Brown Tree Creepers in plenty, White Face, Chestnut-rumped Thornbills and Mallee Ringnecks. Gilbert Whistlers were not recorded, although an unidentified female whistler was seen by one of the group.

-the floating spider webs, drifting through the sky, and settling.

New bird records for the Club's list were Blackbird, Singing Honeyeater and Buff-rump Thornbill.

EP

Observations for May

- * The narrow leafed form of Wirrilda just coming into flower. (the broader leafed form flowers in spring). G.B.
- * A spotted Quail-thrush seen at Poverty Gully. C.M.
- * Huge patches of bluebells have been seen on Mount Alexander. Always a few have been seen, but never in the numbers which are there this year. M.H.
- * The White Ibis which is always seen on its own has been at the dam at North Castlemaine again over the past month. R.M.
- * Spinebills back in the gardens at Campbell and Wheeler Sts. K.T. and G.B.
- * Up to six kangaroos at the dam opposite the Junior College twice during the third week of May. B.E.
- * Solitary White-faced Heron on home paddock in Harcourt. B.E.
- * Blue Wrens appearing to admire themselves in the car mirror on more than one occasion, also a young male checking out his reflection in a piece of broken mirror. B.E.
- * Pair of eagles observed on different occasions over the Calder Highway at Big Hill. K.T., M.O., and C.M.
- * Kookaburras nesting in Newcombe St. C.M.
- * Numerous kangaroos seen near Cemetary Rd. Elphinstone and Ross Dve., Little Bendigo 23/5. C.M.
- * Koala seen again on Sandon property on 12/4. S.S.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

General Meetings are held at Continuing Education, Templeton Street.

Fri June 14 "Seed collection and propagation", and "Rehabilitation of mined areas". Speaker is Marilyn Sprague. 8pm, Cont. Ed.

Sat June 15 Falls at Malmsbury on private property. Leader, B. Maund. Leave CHIRP, 13 Mostyn St., at 1.30pm.

N.B. Thurs June 25 Thursday Birdwatching. From this month the Thursday birdwatching will be held on the fourth Thursday of the month. Meet at Continuing Ed. at 9.30am.

Fri July 12. Some Birds of the Castlemaine District Program by Club members. Chris Morris, local honeyeaters; George Broadway, cuckoos; Ern Perkins, thornbills; Brenda Envall, swallows and swifts; Rita Mills, Frogmouths, nightjars; Kay Turner and Maggie Oliver, flycatchers; Bob Webb, White-winged Choughs.

Sat July 13. Mount Alexander The new walking track for the agile, and Koala Park for others. Leaders E. Perkins and R. Mills.

Fri Aug 9. Turkey and its Wildflowers. Speaker is Hillary Weatherhead.

Sat Aug 10 Walk along the Great Dividing Trail between spring Gully and Fryerstown. Leader M. Willis,

→ Wed Sept 11 Working Bee pulling Cape Broom. Meet 9am, cr. Mary St and Froomes Road. Bring thick gloves.

Sat Sept 14 Lockwood Forest Leader E. Perkins.

Sat, Sun Oct 12 & 13 Alan Reid's property, Burns Road, Yea. See note p.7. May C.N. There is also room for camping and caravans.

Fri Nov 8 Plants of the Ballarat District Speaker is Ern Perkins

Sat Nov 9 Ballarat area. Leader E. Perkins.

Sat Dec. 14. Discovery walk from the Shire boundary to Barrinhup along the Carisbrook/Baringhup road, (approx 5-6 km).

Committee: C. Morris (Pres.), G. Broadway (V.P.), M. Willis (Interim Sec.), B. Envall (Treas.), K. Turner, R.Mills (P.O. & N/L Ed.), E. Perkins, M. Oliver, B. Maund, J. Hewetson, M. Dredge.

Meetings:-

General - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at Continuing Education, Templeton St. at 8 pm.

Business - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. All Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions - 1996

Ordinary Membership: single \$14 Family \$20

Pensioner/Student: Single \$10 Family \$16.

Supporting \$25

Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6

Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.

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